

Capitol Contact

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Heritage Area Legislation

The National Park Service has long recognized that there are many distinctive landscapes, corridors, and places that are deserving of some level of federal technical or financial assistance. But because these areas either lack sufficient national significance or for a variety of other reasons are not considered appropriate or well suited to management as traditional national park units, in the past, without a well-placed congressional sponsor, such areas have had little chance for federal funding and support.

For several years now, the NPS has been exploring the possibility of establishing a new statutory system to assist in the conservation and interpretation of these special places. A "National Heritage Area" could be defined as a place where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally-distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. Roger Kennedy, the new Director of the Service, has heartily endorsed the concept, though, until recently, the administration has not openly discussed the proposal with members of Congress.

On June 15, 1993, New York Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and a new member of the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands introduced legislation (HR 2416) based on the concepts envisioned in the proposed NPS heritage partnership program. On September 21, 1993, however, in a hearing before the Senate Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests's Subcommittee on S. 1033 (Senator John Warner's (R-VA) bill to establish the Shenandoah Valley National Battlefields in Virginia) and S. 1341 (Senator Robert Byrd's (D-WV) Wheeling National Heritage Area in West Virginia), the National Park Service discussed the Administration's views on heritage area legislation that the Service expects to see introduced shortly.

The catalyst for the Service's proposal is the plethora of bills introduced in recent years which seek to establish either new national park units or new national heritage corridors. Two such bills—Senator Robert Byrd's Wheeling National Heritage Area legislation (S. 1341) and Senator Ted Kennedy's (D-MA) Essex Heritage Area in Massachusetts (S. 1342)—were introduced the very same

day, August 3. These bills, together with Senator Jim Jefford's (R-VT) Lake Champlain Valley and Upper Hudson River Valley Heritage Area Study Act (S. 1327), Senator Patrick Moynihan's (D-NY) Hudson River Artist's National Historical Park (S. 112), and Senator John Warner's Shenandoah Valley National Battlefields Act (S. 1033), are expected to become focal points of debate over whether to establish a new "National Heritage Area" designation.

As introduced by their congressional sponsors, the latter two bills seek to establish full-fledged new national park units. However, the NPS testimony on the Wheeling and Shenandoah bills suggested that Administration officials would like to see these areas and others like them as likely candidates for the proposed new National Heritage Area program, "an alternative approach that would meet the needs of local communities without creating a management and financial burden for the federal government."

During the hearing, Senator Byrd reiterated his enthusiasm for the Wheeling project which he felt "could serve as a model" for future heritage areas. "Rather than depending on long-term federal financial assistance," said Byrd, "the role of the federal government is envisioned as short-term to aid the influx of capital to assist in the development of the interpretive venues." Byrd's proposal is also unique in that it seeks to eventually make the Wheeling Heritage Area self-sustaining.

Senator Warner and Civil War Battlefield preservationists who testified in favor of S. 1033 (Warner's bill provided for the designation of a 1,140-acre "core" for a new national battlefield) expressed some concern over the NPS recommendation not to establish a full-fledged national battlefield park unit in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Wil Green, Executive Director of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites Inc. (APCWS), argued that the NPS position ran contrary to its own Civil War Battlefield Commission's recommendations and failed to provide for the preservation of nationally-significant resources "in perpetuity." John P. Monahan III, President of the Stonewall Brigade Foundation, minced no words when he declared that the NPS proposal for the Valley battlefields "would fail to preserve the endangered battlefields." In testimony submitted to the Committee, National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) argued that the NPS Heritage Area proposal should not be used as a vehicle to stop designating new clearly nationally-significant NPS areas merely for fiscal reasons.

While NPCA and other organizations have expressed concern over the new her-

itage partnership proposal, a National Heritage Area's Coalition has recently been established to advance some form of a national program for heritage areas. Though the coalition has not endorsed representative Hinchey's legislation or the NPS proposal discussed during the recent congressional hearing, there is little disagreement among the preservationists that some form of regional heritage development program funded by the federal government would be beneficial. However, the all-important question relates to the programs' likely funding source. According to some Capitol Hill sources, establishment of a National Heritage Area System faces an uphill battle, especially during this budget-sensitive Congress.

If you would like a copy of any of the bills or testimony discussed above, drop me a note at National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036.

Viewpoint

Letters

Park Roads and Parkways

Dear Editor:

I am writing concerning the excellent article "Made for Motoring" by Sara Amy Leach in Volume 16, No. 6.

As Ms. Leach notes, the Bronx River Parkway, 13 miles of which are owned by the County of Westchester, was "...the first of its kind"; i.e., the first public, limited access parkway. For that reason, and because of other characteristics including landscape and bridge design and environmental significance, 10 miles of the Westchester section of the Parkway Reservation were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in January 1991.

However, when the Parkway was dedicated in 1925, most Americans drove primarily for pleasure, at speeds that allowed them to enjoy the scenic experience provided by the Reservation. Today, the Parkway functions as a major commutation route, in addition to being "a road through a park," and the average speed is often twice that for which the Parkway was designed.

Are the two functions completely incompatible? Can a parkway meet Federal Highway Standards while maintaining its environmental, historical and architectural significance? Westchester

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